

STATEMENT OF STATEMENT OF KATHERINE H. STEVENSON, ACTING ASSISTANT DIRECTOR, BUSINESS SERVICES, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES, SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, CONCERNING S. 955, A BILL TO ESTABLISH THE ABRAHAM LINCOLN NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA

July 12, 2007

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to appear before your committee to present the views of the Department of the Interior on S. 955, a bill to establish the Abraham Lincoln National Heritage Area in the State of Illinois.

In 1998, the Looking for Lincoln Heritage Project, a grassroots organization in central Illinois, coordinated a community effort to promote tourism, using the various aspects of Abraham Lincoln's life. It initially focused on single projects and strategic planning with a variety of public and private resources to help local communities research their connections to Lincoln and his times. However, as they moved forward, the scope of the project broadened to identify and promote the various natural, social, and cultural landscapes that made up Lincoln's life. As a result, work toward developing a National Heritage Area (NHA) began with the idea that the National Park Service's Lincoln Home National Historic Site and the future Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum would serve as the central core.

The Looking for Lincoln Heritage Coalition submitted a feasibility study to designate the Abraham Lincoln National Heritage Area to the National Park Service for review. The study concluded that the region met all of the criteria for designation as a NHA. Nevertheless, we recommend that the committee defer action on S. 955 and all other proposed heritage area

designations until program legislation is enacted that establishes guidelines and a process for the designation of NHAs.

Last year, the Administration sent to Congress a legislative proposal to establish guidelines and a process for designation. Bills were introduced in the 109th Congress (S. 243, H.R. 760 and H.R. 6287) that incorporated the majority of the provisions of the Administration's proposal, and S. 243 passed the Senate. During the 110th Congress, a similar heritage area program bill, S. 278, has been introduced, and we look forward to continuing to work with Congress on this very important issue.

With 37 national heritage areas designated across 27 states, and more heritage area legislative proposals in the pipeline, the Administration believes it is critical at this juncture for Congress to enact NHA program legislation. This legislation would provide a much-needed framework for evaluating proposed NHAs, offering guidelines for successful planning and management, clarifying the roles and responsibilities of all parties, and standardizing timeframes and funding for designated areas. Program legislation also would clarify the expectation that heritage areas work toward self-sufficiency by outlining the necessary steps, including appropriate planning, to achieve that shared goal.

S. 955 establishes the Abraham Lincoln National Heritage Area in a core area defined by 42 counties in central Illinois. We expect that the final boundary may be a more manageable size. The area includes rich opportunities where visitors may experience the physical environment of rivers, woodlands, and prairies familiar to Abraham Lincoln and his generation. There are many

cultural and historic sites, including the Lincoln Tomb State Historic Site, the Lincoln Home National Historic Site, the Lincoln Douglas Debate Museum, the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library & Museum, and a broad diversity of folklife throughout the “Land of Lincoln.”

S. 955 designates the Looking for Lincoln Heritage Coalition as the management entity and outlines its duties. The bill also authorizes the development of a management plan within three years of enactment and authorizes the use of federal funds to develop and implement that plan. If the plan is not submitted within three years of enactment of this Act, the NHA becomes ineligible for federal funding until a plan is submitted to the Secretary. Additionally, the Secretary may, at the request of the management entity, provide technical assistance and enter into cooperative agreements with other public and private entities.

S. 955 also contains safeguards to protect private property, including a prohibition on the use of federal funds to acquire real property. The bill proposes no new restrictions with regard to public use and access to private property.

Abraham Lincoln was an itinerate lawyer who traveled extensively through a large region in central Illinois. Hours spent riding through the area, mostly by horseback, bonded the man and the landscape together. The region tells the comprehensive story of this important man, lawyer, husband, father, and our nation’s 16th President. It is here that Abraham Lincoln pondered this nation, formed his convictions, and even created his debate platform for the now famous Lincoln-Douglas debates still resounding across this region through continued dialog of the same themes.

Abraham Lincoln and his wife, Mary Todd, owned only one home in the heart of Illinois, and it is here that he returned for his permanent rest. The home itself and the neighborhood describe an emotional Abraham Lincoln, who opened his farewell remarks to the citizens of Springfield, Illinois on February 11, 1861 with these words: “My friends – No one, not in my situation, can appreciate my feeling of sadness at this parting. To this place, and the kindness of these people, I owe everything.” He might very well have been speaking to friends and neighbors he had met with and represented as their lawyer throughout the 24 years he had ridden throughout the region. Lincoln left the home he and his family had lived in for 17 years to serve as president of a nation on the verge of a civil war.

While the proposed Abraham Lincoln National Heritage Area contains significant natural, historical, and cultural resources, we would again request that the committee defer action until national heritage area program legislation is enacted.

If the Committee chooses to move forward with this bill, the Department would recommend that the bill be amended to include an additional requirement for an evaluation to be conducted by the Secretary, three years prior to the cessation of federal funding under this act. The evaluation would examine the accomplishments of the heritage area in meeting the goals of the management plan; analyze the leveraging and impact of investments to the heritage area; identify the critical components of the management structure and sustainability of the heritage area; and recommend what future role, if any, the National Park Service should have with respect to the heritage area.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my prepared remarks. I would be pleased to answer any questions you or other members of the Subcommittee may have.